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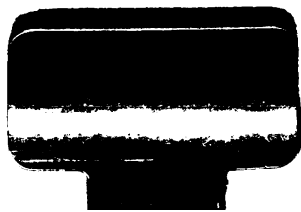
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## PARISH HISTORY AND RECORDS



HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF HISTORY. No. 15

EDITED BY C. JOHNSON, M.A., AND J. P. WHITNEY, B.D., D.C.L.

# PARISH HISTORY AND RECORDS

BY

*Accession 11221*  
A. HAMILTON THOMPSON  
M.A., F.S.A.

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## PARISH HISTORY AND RECORDS

### I

THE parish has an ecclesiastical origin, and, although the word has acquired a wider sense in comparatively modern times, it still means to most people a local area with its centre in a village with a parish church. As a matter of fact, like the word "diocese," its original sense has been considerably limited. The diocese (*διοίκησις*, *diocesis*) in the organisation of the later Roman empire was a civil division including many provinces: Britain, Gaul, Italy and Spain each formed one of the thirteen dioceses into which the empire was divided at the time of the death of Theodosius the Great. As the Christian Church spread throughout the Roman dominions, ecclesiastical establishments, under the presidency of bishops, were founded in large provincial cities. The districts to which their missionary efforts extended received the title of dioceses. These, as necessity arose, were subdivided: bishops were appointed as suffragans or assistants to the bishop of the mother-city, each with jurisdiction over a parish (*παροικία*, *paroecia* or *parochia*) or subordinate



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diocese with its own local cathedral church and a residence for its bishop.<sup>1</sup> In process of time, the large area of the diocesan parish became too populous for its constant supervision by the bishop and his central body of clergy and was mapped out into a number of local divisions, each having a church and resident priest or parson. To these small areas the name of parish became applied; while, similarly, the original parish to which they belonged acquired the name of diocese, and the original ecclesiastical diocese, under an archbishop or metropolitan, consisted of a number of dioceses under the title, borrowed from the civil administration, of province.<sup>2</sup> It may be noted, however, that such terms are elastic, and that, while *parochia* was in general use for the diocese, the parish was occasionally called *diocesis*.<sup>3</sup>

In England the parochial system came into existence long before the Norman conquest. The *parochiae* formed by Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, 668–690, were not parishes in the modern sense but dioceses.<sup>4</sup> Still, as soon as these large *parochiae* are constituted, we find the smaller parish in process of formation. A Christian land-owner in the neighbourhood of some eccle-

<sup>1</sup> For the early organisation of the Christian Church in the Roman empire, see Turner, C. H., in *Cambridge Medieval History*, I, 148–182.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the ecclesiastical province of Lyons, the Roman capital of Gaul, corresponded to the civil province of Gallia Lugdunensis prima, with its suffragans in the old tribal capitals of Autun, Chalon-sur-Saône, Langres and Mâcon.

<sup>3</sup> See Ducange, *Glossarium*, s.v. *diocesis*.

<sup>4</sup> See Bede, *Hist. Eccl.*, IV, ii, v.

siastical centre founds a church on his property for the use of his tenants. Puch and Addi, noble-men who are lords of vills near Beverley, found churches near their country houses and invite St. John of Beverley, archbishop of York 705-718, to consecrate them.<sup>1</sup> In this way, through the cooperation of the lords of manors, to use a later and more familiar term, the small parish is formed. Collections of parishes were sometimes worked from a centre; and in Domesday (1086) there is abundant evidence of the existence before and after the Conquest of small colleges of priests, leading a common life, and serving churches within easy reach of their own church and dwelling-house.<sup>2</sup> But at the time of Domesday the principle of the parish as the ecclesiastical unit with its resident priest was already well recognised;<sup>3</sup> and, in the course of the next century, the parochial geography of England assumed a form which it continued to bear with little change for centuries. If we compare, for example, the names of the parish churches of the archdeaconry of Leicester as they were returned to Hugh Welles, bishop of Lincoln 1209-1285,<sup>4</sup> with the eighteenth-century lists in

<sup>1</sup> See Bede, *Hist. Eccl.*, IV, iv, v.

<sup>2</sup> See the valuable article by Page, W., *Some Remarks on the Churches of the Domesday Survey*, in *Archaeologia*, LXVI, 61-102.

<sup>3</sup> This is to be inferred alike from the number and locality of the churches mentioned in Domesday and from the numerous remains of pre-conquest parish churches still existing. On the other hand, the compilers of Domesday were not concerned with ecclesiastical polity, and, where they mention churches, the financial relations of the church to the manor were their sole object.

<sup>4</sup> *Rotuli Hugonis de Welles* (Cant. and York Soc.), I, 288-272.

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Ecton's *Thesaurus* and Bacon's *Liber Regis*, we shall find that only a few have vanished or have become consolidated with others. Otherwise the alterations of the parishes and the rural deaneries to which they' belong have been of the most trifling kind until the beginning, still within living memory, of the obliteration on a large scale of ancient boundaries in the interests of modern efficiency.

Generally speaking, owing to the action of the local land-owner in harmony with the Church, the English parish corresponds to the vill or township.<sup>1</sup> This is true, at any rate, of the greater part of England south of Trent, where large parishes comprising several vills, though not uncommon, are the exception. In the wilder country north of Trent, where population was sparse and civilisation more gradual, the parishes were as a rule larger and included several scattered vills. Thus, of the two largest dioceses of medieval England, Lincoln contained some 1750 parishes, while the number in York, which was actually larger in area, was under 700. There is a vast difference between the normal Midland parish of between two and three thousand acres and the great medieval parishes of western Yorkshire, Halifax with 75,000, Aysgarth with nearly 80,000 acres. In one case, the historian has to deal with a compact and well-defined area; in the other, he has to pursue the history of a large and intricate district,

<sup>1</sup> See Pollock and Maitland, *Hist. of English Law*, 2nd. Ed., I, 560-2.

the various parts of which have often separate interests and, even before the end of the middle ages, had acquired a virtual independence of the parochial centre.

During the middle ages, the parish was purely an ecclesiastical division. When, however, the duty of relieving the poor, hitherto entrusted to the Church, was taken over by the State in the reign of Henry VIII, the ecclesiastical parish became the natural unit for the collection of the poor rate and the appointment of overseers in each parish was established by the poor-law act of 1601. Thus the civil existence of the parish, as distinct from its ecclesiastical status, was recognised. But, as we have seen, the ecclesiastical parish may consist of several townships without any close connexion with each other; and so, as the civil parish became invested with further powers of local government, its limits were narrowed until it has become coextensive with a single vill or township. The Parish Councils act of 1889 defined a parish, in its statutory sense, as "a place for which a separate poor rate is or can be made, or for which a separate overseer is or can be appointed."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, with the growth of population, the old ecclesiastical parishes have been split up into new parishes: old outlying chapels have become parish churches and new churches have been built until, for example, the great parish of Halifax has developed into a rural deanery of some forty independent parishes. In this way,

<sup>1</sup> See Pollock and Maitland, *op. cit.*, I, 561.

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the ecclesiastical and civil parish are two entirely distinct things.

The enquirer into parochial records is thus beset by a difficulty at the beginning of his work. He has to deal with the history of a district, which may be primarily one thing in the minds of the incumbent and churchwardens, while to the overseers and poor-law guardians it may mean something else. If the ecclesiastical and civil parishes are conterminous, his work is clearly defined for him; but, if the district has undergone much subdivision for purposes of Church and State alike, and if there have been early signs of cleavage in the old ecclesiastical parish or of a self-contained life in any part of it, his task is much harder and he may have to restrict himself to a corner of the subject. In any case, before he begins to collect material, he must confine himself to definite limits and have a clear notion of the historical points which it is his purpose to illustrate.

## II

A fairly complete example of the task which lies before the historian of a parish may be taken from the south of Leicestershire.<sup>1</sup> The village of Medbourne lies six miles north-east of Market Harborough, not far from the line of a Roman road which, coming from Cambridge and Huntingdon, crossed the Welland at this point on its way to Leicester. The ecclesiastical parish appears during the century following the Norman conquest as including three separate vills or townships, viz. Medbourne, Holt, and the eastern part of the township of Blaston. In these three places the Crown was lord of the manor. In the course of the twelfth century, the manors of Holt and Blaston were granted by the Crown to local knights who had deserved well of it: tradition had it that Ralph Nevyle received the manor of Blaston because he had been with Richard I in the Holy Land "when he killed the lion." Holt and Blaston were both at some distance from the parish church of Medbourne; and, owing to the difficulty which the inhabitants found in attending service at the mother church in winter or wet weather, chapels

<sup>1</sup> The chief source for these details is the long and entertaining certificate of an inquiry held in 1812-3, when the rectory of the chapel of St. Giles, Blaston, was vacant. The document is in the Lincoln episcopal registers, vol. II, ff. 219-221d.

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were founded for their convenience at an early date close to the manor-houses in each place. There was certainly a chapel at Holt in the twelfth century, while the chapel of St. Giles at Blaston was said to have been founded by Richard Nevyle shortly before the grant of the manor to Ralph Nevyle. It may be noted that the western part of the vill of Blaston was in the parish of Hallatree and that the manor belonged to the abbot and convent of Peterborough, who founded a separate chapel for their tenants a few hundred yards west of the royal chapel of St. Giles. Chapels exist on both sites to-day and remind us how closely the local organisation of the Church depended from its origin upon ownership of property.

The chapel of Holt, closely adjoining a beautiful manor-house largely rebuilt in the fifteenth century and further enlarged at later dates, is still dependent upon the mother church at Medbourne. But the chapel of Blaston, relying upon its foundation by a king of England, was already claiming early in the fourteenth century to be treated as a free chapel independent of Medbourne; and, as a matter of fact, its incumbent, instead of being a mere chaplain appointed by the rector of Medbourne, was himself a rector, presented by the lord of the manor and instituted by the bishop. The separation between the mother church and the chapel was virtually complete, with this exception that the rector of Medbourne nominally had the cure of souls in Blaston and that the rector of Blaston, who held his chapel without cure of souls,

paid him five shillings a year in token of subjection. At the present time, Blaston St. Giles is a distinct parish with its own cure of souls, but the annual payment of five shillings is still made.

It is obvious that the historian of Medbourne, if he takes the old ecclesiastical parish as the area of his work, has to deal with three townships which, from the point of view of property law, are three separate manors and at present are three distinct civil parishes; while the original ecclesiastical parish is now two. Further, in the case of Blaston, he will be obliged to deal to some extent with the western manor of the township and so encroach upon the history of a neighbouring parish. If he confines himself to Medbourne, he will find that Holt and Blaston constantly intrude upon his scheme: if to Holt or Blaston, he will have to turn continually for reference to Medbourne. The bonds which connect an early parish church with its dependencies, however distinct their civil history may become, are not easily broken; and the most satisfactory scheme, although it involves wider and more prolonged research, is to work on the lines of the early ecclesiastical boundaries.

The history, undertaken on these lines, will solve itself into three main divisions: manorial, ecclesiastical, and social; the history of the manors, the church and its chapels, and the townships. These, it will be seen, may overlap at many points. The lord of the manor is frequently lord of the church. The chaplain of Holt was virtually the



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lord of the manor's chaplain, but his appointment depended upon the rector of Medbourne. The lord of the manor and the rector will both have something to say in the local government of the township. Further, as a supplement to the history, the ancient monuments of the parish will demand description; and where the church is of special interest or where, as at Holt, there is a great manor-house, the growth of many generations, such description must necessarily be somewhat elaborate. Finally, it often happens that, within the confines of a parish, a monastery or some other religious house, such as a hospital, has been founded. This has its separate history, which is generally connected in great part with property outside the parish and, where documents are plentiful, requires independent treatment. But the history of a small monastery, such as the priory of Austin canons at Bradley in the parish of Medbourne, the documentary history of which is scanty, falls within the compass of the parochial history; while the hospitals of the past often survive in the almshouses and charitable institutions of a modern parish.

## III

The value of a parochial history depends upon the use which the compiler makes of original records and is very much enhanced by the amount of unpublished material which he brings to light in his researches. He will probably find that others have been at work before him. The monumental county histories of the past and their successors, the *Victoria County Histories* of modern times, will often supply him with the framework for his task; while the transactions of the local archaeological society will generally yield more or less information of a valuable, if sometimes imperfectly digested, kind. The value of the publications of a record society, such as the Surtees Society, which for over eighty years has printed documents of all kinds relating to the northern counties, is incalculable.<sup>1</sup> Even where his work is confined to little more than editing and bringing up to date the work of a predecessor, the scientific student will be able to amplify and correct to an extent which at first he may hardly suspect. The difficulties with which he has to compete are

<sup>1</sup> As an example of the work of the society may be mentioned a volume (No. XLIX) indispensable to the local historian of Yorkshire, *The Survey of the County of York . . . commonly called Kirkby's Inquest: also Inquisitions of Knights' Fees, the Nomina Villarum for Yorkshire, and an appendix of illustrative documents* [ed. Skaife, R. H.], 1867.

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the variety of his material and the fact that very little of it is usually to be found within the parish itself.

Records may roughly be divided into two headings,\* civil and ecclesiastical; and in both cases their original object is primarily legal. They are testimonies to the ownership and transfer of property, to the rights of individuals or corporations in a certain place or estate, to the administration of local jurisdiction. Here and there the muniment-room of a manor-house or castle whose documents have suffered no disturbance will provide a store of charters, leases, and records of law-suits in which the history of its owners is written, or a succession of court-rolls which supplies long evidence for the tenure of property and its transfer from one tenant to another. This, however, is by no means always the case. Family records have been dispersed and lost to sight or have found their way into some private collection in a distant part of England. Or the manor may have been one of many scattered lordships belonging to some great ruling family or well-endowed religious house, among whose archives the cardinal documents of its history are preserved. Thus the historian of a group of villages near Lincoln, Fiskerton, Reepham, Sudbrook and Scothern, or of Collingham near Newark, where the abbot and convent of Peterborough were lords of the manor, will have to look for charters and court-rolls at Peterborough among the muniments of the dean and chapter. Even then his work will not be

complete, as the records of the abbey were scattered at the suppression. Some of its registers and chartularies are in the British Museum; others are probably still in private hands.<sup>1</sup> A reference to the numerous reports of the Historical MSS. commission will show how much miscellaneous material for local history exists in the custody of cathedral chapters, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, or of the owners of some important house such as Belvoir castle.

The student who has made himself acquainted with the general lines of the history of his chosen area and with the nature of his local resources will naturally look out for the more distant collections of documents which are likely to aid him. His labour, however, will be materially lightened if, before working at unpublished MSS., he exhausts as far as possible all that has hitherto appeared in print. The manorial history will be his first care; for, in tracing the ownership of the manor, he will come across much that will help him in the other

<sup>1</sup> Thus the register of abbots Genge and Depyng (1397-1439) is in the British Museum (MS. Add. 25,288), while that of abbots Assheton and Ramsey (1439-96) is in the library of the dean and chapter of Peterborough. The great thirteenth-century chronicle and chartulary known as Swapham, and two small chartularies recovered by White Kennett for the library early in the eighteenth century, are still at Peterborough with other miscellaneous documents. The *Liber Niger* of the abbey is in the library of the Society of Antiquaries. The fifteenth-century customary is in the Lambeth palace library. Two books of charters and kindred documents which belonged to the abbey and passed into the library of Milton park were bought by local purchasers early in 1918: a third, containing Walter of Whitteley's chronicle and other matter relating to Peterborough, has passed into other hands.

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divisions of his work. The entry or entries in Domesday will supply him with a starting-point, from which he can work back through the printed collections of Saxon charters in Kemble's *Codex Diplomaticus*, Thorpe's *Diplomatarium Anglicum*, and Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum*, and forward through such medieval documents as he will find printed in full or summarised in the local volumes to which we have already referred or in more general collections. The large volumes, including the earliest Charter, Patent, Close and Pipe rolls and some important records of Crown pleas, issued by the Record commission early in the nineteenth century, provide much evidence for the early history of manors. Still more useful are the Calendars of various public records now in progress, which include the complete series of Patent rolls from the reign of Henry III to that of Henry VII, and large series of State papers for the reigns of Henry VIII<sup>1</sup> and later monarchs, while the contents of the Close, Charter and Fine rolls, Inquisitions *post mortem* and other indispensable sets of documents are being treated in the same way and are advancing towards completeness. The admirable indexes to these volumes enable the student to find his way about them with ease; and, although the documents which they contain, emanating from the royal chancery and exchequer, are primarily concerned with property held in chief, *i.e.*, directly from the Crown, he will be un-

<sup>1</sup> The Patent and Close rolls are calendared in these volume and arranged chronologically among the other documents.

lucky if he does not glean from them some local or personal details bearing upon his chosen subject. The volume of *Feudal Aids* in the same series which relates to his county furnishes some leading landmarks in the medieval history of its various manors; and the publications of the Pipe roll Society, although covering little more than the greater part of the reign of Henry II, throw light upon a period for which the Charter, Patent and Close rolls are deficient.

Lists of printed sources, however, could be extended indefinitely. Local references, for instance, may be constantly found in the series of *Chronicles and Memorials* published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, in the legal records published with translations by the Selden Society and in the great collections of charters and other documents in Rymer's *Foedera*, the *Monasticon Anglicanum* and similar monuments of the research of a past age. Nor should the more modern books which we owe to private enterprise and scholarship be forgotten. The historian of a Yorkshire parish will find almost certain help from Dr. Farrer's *corpus* of *Early Yorkshire Charters*, while for certain districts he will be well advised to consult Mr. Lancaster's privately printed chartularies of Bridlington and Fountains. It should be remembered that, if the examination and collation of printed records is laborious and may yield a disappointingly small result, it has one great advantage apart from the benefits which are the searcher's primary object.

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It familiarises the student with the various types and forms of document which he has to handle; and, when he comes to such documents in manuscript, the experience which he has gained will enable him to grasp their meaning and extract their essential matter far more surely and expeditiously than if in his eagerness he attacks them without preliminary guidance.

The worker, as we have said, is fortunate if he has in his own neighbourhood some storehouse of original documents to which he can obtain access. Even in this case, there are two great repositories of whose contents he will be obliged to avail himself, the Public Record Office and the vast store of miscellaneous MSS. in the British Museum. Of the varied contents of these collections it is impossible in the present space to give more than the briefest idea. The official *Guide to the Public Records* by Mr. Scargill-Bird classifies and explains the scope of the documents which are the chief sources of our national history;<sup>1</sup> while Dr. Cox's *How to Write the History of a Parish*, a helpful guide which has lightened the labours of many a local historian, indicates many classes of records in which research may be fruitful. It is only, however, by practical experience and by learning to use the catalogues and indexes in both places to the best advantage that the student will put himself in the way of getting what he wants. In spite of the library of indexes and calendars, ancient and modern, in the literary research room

<sup>1</sup> See also Mr. C. Johnson's *The Public Record Office in the present series*.

at the Record Office, its treasures have not yet been fully explored, and there is always the possibility that the careful searcher may light upon some unsuspected source of information.

One important line of research for the manorial history of a parish may be emphasised. The descent of a manor is often extremely complicated: it frequently descends to co-heirs or passes by special remainder to some branch of the family whose history is obscure, or, again, falls into the hands of a succession of lessees. Printed sources, however fruitful, will seldom in such cases supply more than an imperfect skeleton; and the missing parts are sometimes undiscoverable. Even where the lord of a manor is a tenant in chief and the descent of his property is well marked by the series of inquisitions held by the Crown escheator after his death, which begin in the thirteenth century, links are occasionally wanting and published pedigrees, especially as regards the early members of a family, are frequently disfigured by mistakes. To complete and correct an imperfect manorial descent, the student should have recourse to the "feet of fines" which, beginning in 1195 and continuing to the end of the reign of William IV, afford "the best illustrations that we have of medieval conveyancing."<sup>1</sup> To secure the transfer of property, a fictitious suit is brought in the king's court or before his itinerant justices, in which the entering tenant demands the property as plaintiff from the existing holder as defendant. The result, called the final concord, is drawn up in the form

<sup>1</sup> Pollock and Maitland, *op. cit.*, II, 97.



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of a triple indenture, two copies of which are delivered to the two parties in the suit respectively, while the third, forming the lowest part or foot of the sheet of parchment, is preserved among the records of the court. These feet of fines are now arranged under their several counties, and printed lists or summaries exist in the publications of many antiquarian and record societies. They form at any rate a singularly useful body of material which has the advantage of being easily consulted.

A much more difficult task lies before the student who undertakes to search the vast mass of plea rolls which contain the records of the courts of King's bench, the Common pleas and the justices itinerant. These include the Curia Regis rolls, extending from the reign of Richard I to the end of that of Henry III, the contemporary series of *Placita coram rege* and *Placita de banco*, beginning with the reign of Edward I, with their later subdivisions, and the Assize rolls for various counties, which begin in the reign of John. The task can hardly be recommended to anyone who has not time and patience to spare; for there are some thousands of these rolls in all and a *De banco* roll, for example, covering proceedings from all parts of England for a single term, begins, not long after the series starts, to consist of several hundred membranes of parchment. Owing to their great extent, very little of the matter hidden in them and indicated merely by the name of the county in the margin of each item has been printed or indexed; and it is obvious that records of suits

relating to a particular place are few and far between. No one, however, who has consulted them has failed to realise the contribution which they make to local history; and references to suits frequently occur in other quarters which provide means of easy and direct reference to the original record. If a worker has the opportunity to undertake a labour of love of which the result may be, for his own purposes, very uncertain, he will at least benefit his fellow-workers by noting entries which concern other places in his own neighbourhood or in the county generally.

Some imperfect indication has thus been given of the general material upon which the local historian has to depend for the civil history of his parish. As his collections accumulate, he will find that, side by side with the history of the manor or manors and the pedigrees of the leading families, he has acquired many details of the social history of the place. The names of tenants and the position of their holdings will become familiar to him in charters and court-rolls; and further, he will gain acquaintance with the topography of the whole parish. From the numerous charters in the Bardney chartulary,<sup>1</sup> for instance, relating to Barton-on-Humber in Lincolnshire, a map of the common fields of the town might be constructed, so precisely is the site of each strip of land indicated; and it may be generally said that there are few villages whose past geography cannot be reconstructed and brought into relation with the present by a patient and systematic enquirer.

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, MS. Cotton, Vespasian E. XX.

## IV

Authorities of an historical turn of mind frequently advise parish priests to devote their leisure to parochial history; and the English clergy have not been backward in following their counsels. Ecclesiastical history naturally takes a prominent place in the eyes of the incumbent of a parish: the church and all that belongs to it is his first care and, even if he is not a trained historian, he will feel some curiosity in the fabric and in his predecessors. Of late years there has been an increase in the laudable custom of hanging up a list of incumbents in a parish church; and, as this is the first step towards the ecclesiastical annals of the parish and such lists are often meagre and incomplete, some detailed hints may be given as to their compilation.

A mere list of names and dates is not enough. One important point in the history of the church is the descent of the advowson or right of patronage, and opposite the name of each incumbent should be given the name of the patron who presented him, with any necessary notes. We have seen that originally the lord of the manor was habitually the founder of the church. Church and manor-house often stand side by side: the chapel of Blaston was so near the manor-house that the lord, as he stood at an upper window of his house, could

take part in divine service and see the Host elevated in the adjoining chapel.<sup>1</sup> The tenants pay their civil dues at the manor-house:<sup>2</sup> their oblations and tithes are paid to the incumbent of the church, who is appointed or presented by the lord of the manor, instituted into his spiritual rights by the bishop of the diocese and inducted into temporal possession by the archdeacon. Thus to our own day many advowsons descend as appendages to the lordship of manors: the lord of the manor is the hereditary *advocatus* or defender of the church and, where the manorial history of a place has been traced, that of the advowson leaves little to be completed. There are cases, however, in which an advowson is a distinct piece of property, a small ecclesiastical manor, as it were, in itself, appurtenant, as the phrase is, to a small piece of land in the parish. Or, again, there are very many instances in which the lord of a manor, for his soul's health, gave away the church—that is to say, the rectory, for in a medieval document *ecclesia*, unless the context clearly shows the contrary, means not the actual fabric but the possessory right which we call the living<sup>3</sup>—to a religious

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 11 above.

<sup>2</sup> See Maitland's definition of the meaning of *manerium* as "a house against which geld is charged," *Domesday Book and Beyond*, p. 120. The word "manor," even in its more extended sense, is not geographical: the lord of the manor is not lord of a definite territory, but of rights customarily attached to a certain house which is or has been the *caput manerii*.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, in such phrases as "Ecclesie de Bredon patronus; Prior de Sancto Oswaldo" (*Rotuli Hug. de Welles* I, 252), or "Magister Nicholaus de Fernhame, presentatus per Abbatem et conventum Westmonasteriensem ad ecclesiam de Audenham"

corporation, a cathedral church, monastery or hospital. Here the corporation in question became permanently rector or parson of the church, presenting a vicar or sometimes, where it could be done, appointing a temporary curate to serve the cure of souls; and its rights descended after the Reformation to an individual lay rector whose heirs and assigns usually retained and still often retain the patronage or advowson of the vicarage.<sup>1</sup>

The records of the institution of rectors or vicars are to be found in the episcopal registers of the diocese in which the church is or was situated.<sup>2</sup> These entries, apart from casual references in other documents such as the Crown presentations which occur in great numbers in the Patent rolls,<sup>3</sup> are the primary and most trustworthy source for a list.

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(*ibid.*, I, 287), the *ecclesia* is the rectory. Strictly, the gift of an *ecclesia* to a religious body was the gift of the advowson; appropriation of the rectory did not necessarily follow. After 1279 the licence to alienate the advowson of a church to a corporate body in mortmain was habitually accompanied by a licence of appropriation granted to the new patrons. Where *ecclesia* is shown by the context to mean a fabric, it usually refers to the nave or body of the church as distinct from the chancel.

<sup>1</sup> Where no vicarage was ordained and the proprietors served the church by curates of their own appointment, the custom was continued by lay rectors after the Reformation. This was the origin of many of the so-called donative benefices which existed till recently, and over which episcopal rights had been allowed to lapse by custom.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Fowler's *Episcopal Registers of England and Wales* in this series.

<sup>3</sup> Such presentations are not certain evidence of incumbency, as they were often made in ignorance of the real circumstances and were constantly revoked. Where there is no evidence from other sources that a Crown presentee held a living, his name should be entered in a list of incumbents with a caution.

They include the date and place of institution, the name, orders and university degree of the presentee, the name of the patron presenting and very frequently the reason of the vacation of the living by the last incumbent, with his name. Further, where there has been litigation about the advowson, the result of the suit is noted and forms a valuable reference to the plea rolls of the time; for in English law an advowson is a piece of real property which comes within the cognisance of the temporal courts. Where it has been necessary to hold an inquisition into the vacancy of a benefice, the details are given at some length and are often curious and instructive. In the dioceses of Lincoln and York these records go back, with a few gaps, to the early part of the thirteenth century: in several other dioceses, including Canterbury, they begin during its second half; while a few begin at various periods during the fourteenth century. The episcopal registers, however, are the only real foundation for a trustworthy and continuous list of medieval incumbents; and such names as may be found elsewhere before they begin cannot be entered upon the list with the same completeness and certainty.

After the Act of Supremacy, when the first-fruits of benefices, hitherto payable to the pope's collectors, passed to the Crown, the episcopal registers are supplemented by the certificates of

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The number of Crown presentations is due to the fact that the lands and tenements of tenants-in-chief frequently returned to the king's disposal—*e.g.*, during the vacancy of a see or monastery, during the minority of an heir, or by forfeiture.

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institutions<sup>1</sup> and the MS. calendars of institutions in the Public Record Office and may be compared with the signatures of incumbents in the parish registers. It should be borne in mind that a mere signature in a parish register, without further evidence to corroborate it, is no evidence of incumbency: it may be merely that of a curate, the deputy of a non-resident rector or vicar. Lists, at all events, which depend too much upon parish registers, in themselves documents of late origin, beginning at earliest in 1588, always need careful comparison with more authoritative sources.

For the compilation of such a list, more than one diocesan registry may have to be consulted, owing to the rearrangement of dioceses at and since the Reformation. In Lincolnshire, Devon, Somerset and several other counties the registers at Lincoln, Exeter, Wells, etc., give continuous information. But a worker, say, in Dorset, having used the Salisbury registers from 1297 to 1542, is for the next three centuries obliged to search the registers at Bristol, which, since the destruction of the old bishop's palace by the rioters in 1831, are very fragmentary, though their contents may be eked out in places by the Subscription Books, containing certificates of clerical subscriptions to the acts

<sup>1</sup> These certificates were returned into the Court of First-fruits and Tenth. They now begin in 1587. The Composition Books for First-fruits begin in 1585: there are indexes to them in the Public Record Office. The Institution Books, containing the names of incumbents and patrons and dates of institutions, begin in the first half of the seventeenth century.

of royal supremacy and uniformity.<sup>1</sup> In 1836 the county was again included in the diocese of Salisbury, in which it still remains. Again, there is a large tract of country including north-west Yorkshire, Lancashire north of the Ribble and the southern parts of Westmorland and Cumberland which, nominally in the diocese of York, was actually a private preserve of the archdeacon of Richmond. The archdeacon instituted to livings and had all the jurisdiction of a bishop, save in so far as he had no power to confer holy orders and administer confirmation.<sup>2</sup> The registers of the archdeacons of Richmond with one exception, the present whereabouts of which is not very clear, have been lost; but short calendars of two of them, covering the period c. 1360–1440 with some gaps, are now among the note-books of the antiquary Matthew Hutton in the Harleian MSS.<sup>3</sup> In 1541 the archdeaconry was transferred to the diocese of Chester and its records until 1836 must be sought at Chester. In 1836 it was split into pieces: the Yorkshire portion went to the new diocese of Ripon, the Cumberland and Westmorland parishes, with the detached portion of Lancashire north of Morecambe bay, to Carlisle; while

<sup>1</sup> The Institution Books and other sources already alluded to in the Public Record Office will, however, go far to supply the deficiencies at Bristol.

<sup>2</sup> The final composition with regard to the archdeacon's rights, signed in 1881 by archbishop Melton and Robert Wodhous, then archdeacon, is printed in *Historians' Ch. York* (Rolls Ser.), III, 248–50.

<sup>3</sup> MS. Harley 6978. These calendars are now being edited for publication in the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*.



in 1847 the rest of the Lancashire parishes were given to the new diocese of Manchester. Printed lists of incumbents of most of the Yorkshire and all the Lancashire churches, so far as they have been gathered, exist in Whitaker's *Richmondshire* and in the *Victoria County History of Lancashire*. It is possible, however, to make additions to these; and a few years ago the present writer found in bishop Gynewell's register at Lincoln (1847-1862) two hitherto unnoticed institutions to livings in the archdeaconry made by the bishop of Lincoln, acting as commissary for the foreign cardinal who was then archdeacon of Richmond.<sup>1</sup>

Even where the succession of registers in one place is continuous until modern times, gaps will occur which it is difficult to fill. Some of these may be supplied, as regards the province of Canterbury, by reference to the archiepiscopal registers at Lambeth palace: the archbishop, as metropolitan, had the right of institution when the sees of his province were vacant and occasionally the right, after a long lapse, devolved upon him. The Lambeth registers, indeed, are full of information with regard to the whole province and have the advantage, not common to many registers, of being well indexed. Similarly the York registers supply gaps during vacancies of the sees of Durham and Carlisle and the archdeaconry of Richmond.

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln Reg. IX, fo. 415. Other sources may provide additional names: thus *Jo..n of Gaunt's Register*, ed. Armitage-Smith, S., contains a number of presentation deeds, among which are three to churches in Richmondshire: one of these supplies a gap in the list of rectors of Ribchester.

When a metropolitan and diocesan see happen to be vacant at the same time, Canterbury searchers may have to consult the registers of the prior and convent and dean and chapter of Canterbury: the *Sede Vacante* register at York is fortunately preserved with the archiepiscopal registers.

The gaps which remain—and there are generally one or two, if not more—are usually due to omissions in posting up registers, which were compiled for permanent record from rough memoranda and not always very carefully. They are apt to occur during the period when exchanges of livings were constantly occurring, which reached its height about the end of the fourteenth century. A fortunate find of the record of an exchange in the registers of another diocese may sometimes supply a need. Thus a Shropshire incumbent in 1440 exchanged his living and a canonry in the New college at Leicester for a church in Cumberland. The exchange should have been entered in three registers, those of the bishops of Lichfield and Lincoln and the archdeacon of Richmond. It may be at Lichfield, but it is not at Lincoln; and the writer found it by a mere chance in the Richmond notes among the Harleian MSS. already referred to. Again, there is no doubt that, during the stress of the Reformation period, episcopal registers, though kept continuously, were kept imperfectly. Problems frequently occur at this point. The writer, once more, calendaring institutions throughout the diocese of York over a

period extending roughly from 1520 to 1570, has found many institutions omitted and reasons of vacancy hard to discover. Thirdly, for the Commonwealth period, recourse must be had to the MS. official records, which, coming into the hands of archbishop Juxon at the Restoration, are deposited at Lambeth; while the appendices to Dr. Shaw's *History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth* are also invaluable. In connexion with omissions in registers, a conspicuous example may be noted. We know that John Wycliffe was presented by the Crown to the church of Lutterworth in 1374, and the Lincoln registers tell us that he vacated Lutterworth by death on December 31, 1384.<sup>1</sup> Of his institution, however, there is no record. Nor, at an earlier date, in 1366, when we know from other sources that he was rector of Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire and a canon of the collegiate church of Westbury-on-Trym in Gloucestershire, does his name appear in the lists of pluralists, made for the information of the holy see and copied in Langham's register at Lambeth. Nor, finally, are his resignation of Ludgershall or his successor's institution recorded, as we should expect to find them, at Lincoln: the first indication that he resigned Ludgershall, as he probably did, in 1374, is a dispensation for non-residence granted to his successor in 1376.<sup>2</sup>

The construction of a really satisfactory list of

<sup>1</sup> *Cal. Patent Rolls*, 1370-4, p. 424; Lincoln Reg. XI, fo. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Reg. XII, fo. 148d.

incumbents is thus a work which involves a large amount of research, especially while the larger number of episcopal registers remain unprinted and uncalendared. Various societies are doing their best to remedy this defect: the Canterbury and York Society, working in co-operation with other similar bodies, has taken several dioceses in hand, while the Hereford and Exeter registers have by this time reached the middle of the fifteenth century, and the York registers, printed by the Surtees Society, are in a forward condition. Such registers, in addition to records of institutions, lists of ordination candidates and various kinds of dispensations, contain a large amount of miscellaneous matter in the form of letters and mandates relating to diocesan business. From these much local information may be gained, generally at the cost of considerable search. It should be said, however, that the primary object of the register was for business purposes of reference, and only a selection of a bishop's more important correspondence was entered in it for the benefit of future times. Such entries saved trouble at a later date. If the patronage of a living came into dispute, the institution records supplied the names of previous patrons. If a clerk could not produce his letters of orders or his title to a benefice which he claimed to hold, or if his documents were suspicious, the registers of the dioceses with which he stated his connexion could be referred to. Correspondence for which further local reference was not required served as a model of common

form, to be varied according to circumstances.<sup>1</sup> Was it necessary for an archbishop of York to admonish the chantry-priests of a church for negligence or to issue a commission to a suffragan for the consecration of a churchyard? His clerks would find an excellent model in Thoresby's mandate to the rural dean of Nottingham to enquire into the slackness of the chantry priests of St. Mary's, and in Zouche's mandates for the hallowing of the churchyards at Windermere and Grasmere shortly before the great pestilence of 1349 visited his diocese. Such forms to suit special occasions became extremely numerous in the fourteenth century and were entered much more sparingly in the fifteenth, when the episcopal chanceries possessed almost all the pattern documents they wanted. The value of bishops' registers for local purposes, apart from the formal records of institutions, thus steadily decreases; but the earlier volumes are full of profit and, even though the fifteenth-century registers are as a rule more jejune, they need not therefore be neglected.

<sup>1</sup> This is clearly shown by the marginal descriptions of documents in episcopal registers, which constantly make no reference to the persons or places mentioned in the documents but indicate merely the general nature of their contents—e.g., "Mandatum ad excommunicandum solemniter candelis accensis, etc., pro violencia illata, etc." (Lincoln Reg. XVI, fo. 225d). An instance of a register which is a common form book and nothing more is Worcester Reg. Brian II, where a number of documents have been copied with initial letters A, B, etc., in place of proper names. A large register of this type, which appears to have belonged to a fifteenth-century archdeacon of Essex, has found its way into the diocesan registry at Peterborough: see *Archæol. Journal*. LXXII, 283-4.

Next to the advowson and incumbency of the church comes the question of chantry foundations in connexion with it. Every mediæval church had more than one altar at which mass was said daily; and the masses at the side altars were very frequently chantry masses said for the repose of the soul of a special benefactor and his relations. Such chantries—the word applies primarily to the service itself, not to the chapel in which it is celebrated—were for the most part temporary arrangements, depending upon the amount and duration of a particular bequest. Legacies to this effect were extremely numerous: sometimes a man left a stock of money to hire a chaplain to say mass for him, sometimes a stock of cattle or sheep. The bequest was administered by his executors or by feoffees; and in many cases parishioners clubbed together to provide means in land, kind or money, which might yield a stipend to a more or less permanent chantry priest in a parish church or a distant chapel. Other and more important, because more securely founded, chantries were those in which a certain amount of land and rent was alienated for ever to a succession of priests who held the chantry thus founded as a freehold benefice. Chantry property in the occupation of feoffees, who merely paid a chaplain at their pleasure, was generally recognised as liable to other charges: it yielded a fund for the repair of local roads, bridges and embankments, for the equipment of militia, for the payment of Crown subsidies, for the dowry of poor maidens, and

consequently, when such objects were pressing, the chaplaincy might and did sometimes lapse.<sup>1</sup> The chantry priest, however, who subsisted on his freehold was always there: his incumbency, terminable only by death or resignation, was as secure as that of the parish priest. Whether permanent or temporary, the chantry priest was expected to join with the parish priest in the daily quire services and to help in hearing the confessions of parishioners at Easter.<sup>2</sup>

The records of freehold chantries, although such benefices were comparatively few in number outside the larger churches, are generally easy to find and interesting to follow. Licences for their foundation, in accordance with the provisions of the statute of mortmain (1279), are entered upon the Patent rolls after that date and occur with frequency throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the era during which the foundation of chantries and colleges of chantry priests in churches takes the place of the foundation of monasteries.

<sup>1</sup> As at Henbury, Glouce., c. 1548-8, where the profits of a "feoffees' service" were devoted to the repair of the sea-walls on the bank of the Severn (Chantry Certif. Roll 22, no. 21; 28, no. 15; see *Trans. Bristol and Glouce. Archaeol. Soc.*, 1915, pp. 159, 160).

<sup>2</sup> The chantry certificates for some counties have been printed: those for Yorkshire (ed. Page, W.) by the Surtees Soc., for Lancashire (ed. Raines) by the Chetham Soc., for Somerset (ed. Green, E.) by the Somerset Record Soc. The present writer has edited those for Leicestershire and Northamptonshire (*Associated Archit. Soc. Reports*, XXX, 468-570; XXXI, 87-178), Nottinghamshire and Southwell (*Trans. Thoroton Soc.* XV-XVIII), and Shropshire (*Proceedings Shropshire Archaeol. Soc.*). Those for Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire have also been printed and those for Lincolnshire have been prepared for publication.

The contemporary bishop's register often contains the full documentary evidence for the foundation and endowment of a particular chantry with its statutes, which, although they are much alike in general form, are always worth reading and noting for the sake of local variations. Institutions to chantries are also found in the episcopal registers; and a late register may sometimes contain a revision of early statutes which have not been clearly worded.<sup>1</sup> For the later history of chantries there is abundant material in the Public Record Office. In addition to the certificates returned under the acts of 1545 and 1547, by which chantry foundations were suppressed, the rent-rolls and other particulars which came into the hands of the Augmentations office at that time are preserved in large numbers. It should not be forgotten that part of a chantry priest's business was to keep a free school for the poor children of the parish and that the history of parochial schools and other charitable institutions may often be linked on by documentary evidence to that of a medieval chantry. In this connexion the numerous works of the late Mr. A. F. Leach, who made the subject of medieval schools in England his own, should be consulted.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, in Lincoln Reg. XXII, where there is a complete revision by bishop Russell in 1491 of the statutes confirmed by bishop Gynewell in 1855 for the Newarke college at Leicester. One main object of such revisions was *declaratio*—*i.e.*, the clearing-up of doubtful phrases.

<sup>2</sup> For the general subject see his *English Schools at the Reformation*, in which are printed such chantry certificates as bear upon schools, and his *The Schools of Mediæval England*, in Methuen's series of "Antiquary's Books."



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For the lesser chantries, especially for those known as feoffees' services, the Public Record Office material will give some help. But, owing to their temporary nature, a complete account of all such benefactions to a particular church is past recovery. Much, however, may be gained from medieval wills, perhaps the most fascinating of all sources of evidence to the explorer. Apart from the collections of more important wills entered in episcopal registers, in the registers of cathedral chapters and of the Prerogative court of Canterbury, wills for the most part of well-to-do clergy and laity, the early registers in local probate offices, to which they have been transferred from ecclesiastical custody, contain a large number of pre-Reformation wills of persons of all conditions. Information about chantries is only a small part of what may be derived from them. They are full of references to the guilds of the parish, religious confraternities with their own chantry-chaplains, to the altars and furniture of the parish church and its chapels, to its "works" or fabric-fund and to many petty circumstances which bring us into close touch with the general life and social organisation of the community.<sup>1</sup> Wills of a later date are naturally less interesting from an ecclesiastical

<sup>1</sup> For the information to be obtained from wills with regard to church fabrics and services see Duncan, L. L., *The Parish Churches of West Kent, their Dedications, Altars, Images, and Lights* (Trans. St. Paul's Ecclesiolog. Soc. III, 241-98); and the similar article by Serjeantson, R. M., and Longden, H. I., upon *The Parish Churches and Religious Houses of Northamptonshire*, (*Archaeol. Journal*, LXX, 217-452).

point of view: their social interest, however, is well maintained. The student who, at Somerset House and the probate registry of his own district, collects the wills for his parish with due appreciation of their human interest and their phraseology, avails himself of one of the best means of enlarging his own knowledge and of communicating his personal interests to others.<sup>1</sup>

The general origin of church endowments is beyond the scope of a parochial history, save where charters throw light upon endowments connected with a particular church. These should of course be recorded and their subsequent history traced. For the assessment of the annual value of a living two main sources are the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of 1291 and the more detailed *Valor Ecclesiasticus* which superseded it as a basis of taxation in 1535. Both of these were printed early in the last century by the Record commission and may be supplemented by the clerical Subsidy rolls in the Record Office and by various diocesan subsidy books in other places, which are also valuable for their enumeration of the names of clergy and chaplains.<sup>2</sup> If the living is a vicarage, the documents for the appropriation of the rectory to its medieval owners

<sup>1</sup> Among printed collections of wills the six volumes of *Testamenta Eboracensia* (Surtees Soc.) should be specially mentioned. Numerous indices to wills in various public offices have been printed in the series known as the Index Library.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Salter, H. E., *A Subsidy collected in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1526*, Oxford, 1909, and the taxations of the clergy of the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in 1525-7, printed from the MSS. of the late T. M. Fallow in *Yorks Archaeol. Journal*, XXI, 243-52, XXIV, 62-80.

and the ordination of the endowment of the vicar should be sought out in the episcopal registers. As many churches were appropriated at an early date, before registers begin, these deeds are often wanting; but brief statements of the early endowments of vicarages are often to be found;<sup>1</sup> while the documents of later years are very full and are apt to be tediously long. When their gist is extracted, however, it is usually of high importance; and the topography of the rectory and vicarage houses with their precincts is frequently set forth with an interesting minuteness of detail.

The sources for chantry endowments have already been indicated. Where there was an important early guild in a parish, details may be sought among the guild certificates of the reign of Richard II in the Public Record Office. Many of these have been printed and those which are in English are collected in the volume upon *English Guilds* published by the Early English Text Society.<sup>2</sup> Another class of documents which is gradually finding its way into print is the Inventories of church furniture and plate made in the reign of Edward VI.<sup>3</sup> Those which exist in the Record

<sup>1</sup> See the numerous ordinations of vicarages printed in *Rotuli Hugonis de Welles* and in the *Liber Antiquus* compiled under the same bishop (ed. Gibbons, A., Lincoln, 1888). These are in great part formal statements of existing arrangements confirmed by the bishop and so made of permanent force.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Smith, Toulmin, 1870, with a preliminary essay by Brentano, L.

<sup>3</sup> These have been printed for various counties, some by the Alcuin Club, others in the Transactions of local societies. The Yorkshire inventories have been published by the Surtees Soc. Numerous inventories for individual churches have been printed:

Office are indexed under their several counties; but there are other inventories of various dates, for example among the college muniments of Oxford and Cambridge, which the student may have to discover for himself. In general interest and picturesqueness of detail such inventories are inferior only to medieval wills: a proper assimilation of their contents goes far to correct the popular ideas of medieval art and ritual which are fostered by the ecclesiastical upholsterer.<sup>1</sup>

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for good examples see the vols. of *Trans. St. Paul's Ecclesiolog. Soc.*, and Peacock, E., *English Church Furniture*, which relates to Lincolnshire churches.

<sup>1</sup> A valuable series of thirteenth and fourteenth century inventories for Cambridgeshire has been published recently in *Vetus Liber Archidiaconi Eliensis*, ed. Feltoe, C. L., and Minns, E. H. (Cambridge Antiquarian Soc. 1917), pp. 80-147.

## V

It has been said already that the resources of the parish itself, where records are concerned, are somewhat limited, and that, even in the case of court-rolls, if they are no longer preserved in the manor-house or in some lawyer's office in a neighbouring town, the searcher may have to go to a considerable distance. Medieval ecclesiastical records must be sought wholly outside the parish, with the exception of such local manorial documents as may concern the advowson and the fortunate but few instances in which the churchwardens' accounts begin before the Reformation or in which the act-books of a medieval guild survive. For the later ecclesiastical history material is more accessible and the parish chest or safe will provide a number of books and miscellaneous documents, tithe-books, terriers, etc., in addition to the parish registers.

The injunctions issued by Henry VIII's vicar-general, Thomas Cromwell, in 1538 included an order to every parish priest to keep a register for weddings, christenings and burials.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> For parish registers generally see the volume by Cox, J. C., in Methuen's "Antiquary Books," to which series the same author has contributed another volume on Churchwardens' accounts. The general history of parish registers is outlined by Burke, A. M., *Key to the Ancient Parish Registers of England and Wales*, 1908; see also *Ecclesiastical Records of the Diocese of Bath and Wells*, ed. Holmes, T. S., Taunton, 1914.

parish was charged to provide a "sure coffer" with two keys, one for the priest and the other for the wardens, in which the book should be kept: the entries for the week were to be made every Sunday by the priest in the presence of the wardens. The order was not obeyed at first without some suspicion and opposition, and early registers were kept unsystematically. In 1597 Convocation took steps for their better preservation by ordering the annual transmission of transcripts from each parish to the diocesan registry, and in the canons of 1604 the orders of 1588 and 1597 were embodied in stricter terms. From this time forward the parish was required to provide a parchment book, which took the place of the indiscriminate use of paper and parchment hitherto prevailing. During the civil wars and Commonwealth important alterations took place: in 1644 the committee for the Directory of public worship ordered that births should be registered in addition to baptisms, and in 1658 Parliament put the duty of registration of births, marriages and burials in the hands of a civil registrar to be elected triennially in each parish. After the Restoration the clergy and churchwardens resumed their responsibility and the subsequent landmarks in the history of parish registers are, first, lord Hardwicke's act for the prevention of clandestine marriages (1753), by which a book of official printed forms was provided as a marriage register; and secondly, sir George Rose's act (1812), which regulated the proper keeping of entries and provided separate printed books

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for baptisms, marriages and burials. The acts of 1836-7 secured the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths; and, as these records can be consulted at Somerset House, the historical interest of parish registers practically ceases from this date.

It is obvious that the chief material to be derived from parish registers is genealogical. The descent of extinct families and of families which have lived for generations in the parish may be traced from them; and the searcher who has the gift of imagination and knows its proper use will be able, by reading between the lines of superficially barren entries, to discover many interesting personal details. Further, many clergy, while parochial registers were still confined to manuscript books, took a refreshingly elastic view of the nature of their contents and, in addition to merely official records, made notes of remarkable occurrences in the church and parish during their incumbency. These, written in quaint and picturesque English or sometimes in Latin, are often of considerable value to the local historian; and, although such notes are merely occasional wherever they are found, their variety is remarkable and entertaining. But, for our purpose, the use of the parish register is limited. Full details for the earlier period during which registers were kept are wanting in many cases. Only a certain percentage of registers contain entries which go back to 1538 or the years immediately succeeding. Many, in their present state, do not begin until long after. Original books

which have been kept in unbroken succession from the earlier period are extremely rare. The early entries generally exist in the form of transcripts made, probably from loose sheets of paper, in the parchment books which were gradually introduced and became obligatory in 1603; while other entries of which no record remains in the parish may sometimes be recovered from the transcripts returned, by no means regularly, to the diocesan registry.

The parish register, as has been said, may often be supplemented by the miscellaneous papers of which a certain number are generally to be found among the parochial documents. These include settlement certificates by which the change of abode of a man and his family from one parish to another is recorded by the testimony of the local overseers for poor-rate purposes, bonds of apprenticeship and papers of a similar kind, covering various departments of parochial activity. One of the subsidiary uses of a parish register is the help which it affords to an estimate of the population of the parish at certain periods. In this respect it is greatly aided by the presence of a plentiful supply of such papers, which usually extend from the later part of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth.

The fascination which parish registers exercise upon their confirmed students is largely due to the individual peculiarities of those who kept them and their varying ideas of their duties, before acts of Parliament had given a stereotyped character to their work. This freedom within limits defined



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without great exactness constitutes the charm of all early documents from Domesday book onwards. Of all documents, however, which concern the internal life of the parish, the most interesting and fruitful are early churchwardens' accounts. These, indeed, may be consulted with profit down to the present day, especially for details respecting repairs and alterations to parish churches; and to a complete architectural history of any such building they are indispensable. In modern times, they have naturally acquired a prosaic formality without, however, losing their individual quality altogether. Earlier accounts are more artless and detailed and afford a wealth of information with regard to the general state of the church and to old customs within the parish. Any parish is happy which possesses a complete series going back to the period before the Reformation or even a single book or fragmentary leaves of pre-Reformation accounts. Such volumes of early churchwardens' accounts as have been printed, bridging over the most critical period in the history of the Church of England and enabling us to estimate precisely the local effect of Reformation changes, are of as much value to the general student of history as to the parochial historian and have besides a literary importance to the student of the English language. To dwell upon their contents would take too long. It is sufficient to refer readers to the churchwardens' accounts of St. Michael's, Bath (1849-1575), printed by the Somerset Record Society; St. Mary at Hill, London (1420-1559),

printed by the Early English Text Society; and of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge (1504-1635), printed by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Among other accounts which have been printed are those of Croscombe, Somerset (1475-1566), by the Somerset Record Society, and those of St. John's, Glastonbury (1366-1625), in *Somerset Notes and Queries*.<sup>1</sup> Such books are naturally rare, and those which remain, such as the early accounts of St. John's, Peterborough, the fifteenth-century guild accounts of St. Peter's, Nottingham, and the fragment at St. Mary's, Leicester, have been examined and extracts from them printed by antiquaries. They have naturally been better preserved in town churches, as at Bristol, Shrewsbury and other places, than in the country; but here and there a country church may be found, as at Banwell, Somerset, with a continuous series beginning in the sixteenth century. Closely allied to these, but dealing with the civil life of the parish, are the accounts of parish constables, which are frequently preserved in the church with other parochial records. A good example of their contents, covering an extremely interesting period (1630-49), will be found in the extracts from a set at Stathern in Leicestershire, near Belvoir castle, printed in vol. lxxix of the *Archaeological Journal*.

To these local sources should be added terriers or surveys and extents of glebe-land, in the custody of the church, and the original copies of enclosure

<sup>1</sup> References to others will be found in Gross, C., *Sources and Literature of English History*, 2nd ed.: see index, pp. 739-40.

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awards, which will usually be found among the records of the parish council, both with a special value for parochial geography. Every scrap of paper, however, which throws any light upon the history of a parish should be examined and inventoried: an unconsidered trifle may often be the source of some valuable piece of knowledge. Now and then, too, some record may be found which cannot be easily classified under a special category. The manor-book of Henry Bray, lord of Harleston, Northants, early in the fourteenth century, tells us among other things of the rebuilding of the church and the way in which the costs were divided.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Botelar, abbot of Shrewsbury, who became vicar of Much Wenlock, kept a diary of his incumbency which has been printed in vol. vi of the *Transactions* of the Shropshire Archaeological Society, full of local and personal details. A much later volume of a somewhat similar kind, valuable to students of church life under the later Stewarts, is the commonplace book of a rector of Clayworth, Notts, which has been published under competent editorship.<sup>2</sup> These are superficially more interesting than the main records which have been described, and by such pleasant paths the beginner may be recommended to approach the serious study of local documents of a less informal kind, for the understanding of which they prepare the way and quicken the appetite.

<sup>1</sup> British Museum MS. Cotton, Nero C xii. An edition of this book is about to be published by the Royal Historical Soc.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Guilford, E. L., and Gill, H., Nottingham, 1912.

## VI

No parish history is complete without an architectural description of the church and other ancient buildings within the parish. This work, it need hardly be said, demands special knowledge and the mere ability to distinguish between the "styles" of English architecture is not sufficient. In the case of churches, early records which bear upon their building are extremely scanty and, where they are found, indefinite. It is not, indeed, until the churchwardens' accounts begin that we can trace the history of the fabric with any certainty; and, as we have seen, such accounts do not begin in most instances until a late date. In writing the history of an ancient dwelling-house, some of the ancient building accounts may survive, or there may be some definite landmark, such as a royal licence to crenellate,<sup>1</sup> to the date of which certain features may be ascribed. Similarly, an occasional indulgence issued by the pope or the diocesan bishop to attract contributions to the rebuilding or repair of a church may be on record. Among the muniments of the church of Totnes in Devon is an original copy of a papal indulgence

<sup>1</sup> These, issued in the form of letters patent, will be found scattered throughout the Calendars of Patent Rolls. A list of the most important is printed as an appendix to Hudson Turner, T., and Parker, J. H., *Domestic Architecture in England*, vol. iv.

granted in 1482 on behalf of the fabric, from which it is possible to give a positive date to the fine western tower.<sup>1</sup> But such documents are exceptional and, in default of written evidence, the building must be left to tell its own story. That story is often difficult and perplexing and, in unravelling it, the assistance and cooperation of a professional architect who is also a competent antiquary is highly desirable. It is also necessary to accompany descriptions of churches and other important buildings with ground-plans in which the process of development is marked by the use of different colours or by a system of shading.<sup>2</sup>

The amount of documentary evidence for the building of churches may easily be over-rated. It may be stated as a general rule that no documentary mention of a church, where the context is not explicitly clear, can be assumed to have any architectural value. A large number of churches in Devon have been confidently dated, even where there is nothing in their fabrics which corresponds to the statement, from the memoranda of their dedications in the Exeter episcopal registers.<sup>3</sup> These form no ground for argument: the churches may have been dedicated because their chancels had been enlarged and contained new altars, or, on the other hand, their dedication may merely have been neglected previously, as was not un-

<sup>1</sup> See *Archaeol. Journal*, XX, 550.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., the series of plans by the late J. T. Mickleton in Walker, J. W., *History of the Cathedral Church of Wakefield*.

<sup>3</sup> The documentary significance of these has been discussed by the present writer, *Church Architecture in Devon* (*Archaeol. Journal*, XX, 458-94).

natural in remote and hilly places. It is noteworthy that the period at which such dedications occur most frequently has left very little architectural influence upon the ordinary parish churches of the county, although the cathedral church of the diocese is one of its noblest memorials. When, however, in 1485, bishop Gray of Lincoln issues a conditional licence for two chantry-chaplains to say mass at two altars recently dedicated in the church of Brampton, near Market Harborough,<sup>1</sup> there is some reason for supposing that these two altars formed part of some addition to the church. As a matter of fact, the nave and aisles of the church were obviously rebuilt about that time and are good examples of a type of early fifteenth-century work common in the Midlands. Here the building primarily is left to tell its own tale; but, the visible architectural evidence agreeing, the bishop's licence corroborates it and furnishes an approximate date.

In like manner, too much is often made of bequests in wills. Occasionally the meaning of these is beyond all doubt and valuable material may be derived from them; but legacies to the "works" of any particular church do not necessarily imply that architectural work was actually going on in the church at the date of the will. The "works" (*fabrica* or *opus*) was the permanent fabric-fund under control of the churchwardens:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln Reg. XVII, fo. 180d.

<sup>2</sup> *Fabrica* in medieval documents is generally to be taken in this sense, unless the context definitely shows that it refers to the actual building. For the practical administration of the *fabrica* of a great church see *York Fabric Rolls* (Surtees Soc.).

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legacies to it were a matter of course and it is only when they are noticeably in excess of their average amount that special building activity may be assumed, or when a special fund for one particular portion of a church—*e.g.*, the “works of the steeple”—is mentioned.<sup>1</sup> Here again the building itself must be consulted. When bishop Alnwick of Lincoln made his will in 1445, he left small sums to each of the parish churches of his episcopal manors. A specially large sum, ten marks, was left to the church of Liddington, Rutland.<sup>2</sup> By itself, this proves nothing but suggests that the church needed a larger bequest than the others and that this need was probably caused by building operations. A visit to the church shows us that the nave was entirely rebuilt on a large scale about the middle of the fifteenth century; and so Alnwick’s legacy may be taken as an approximate indication of the date at which the work was in progress. In any case, the greatest caution should be taken in reading architectural meanings into documents which are not primarily concerned with architecture. To do so is to commit the error by which the mention of a church and a priest in Domesday is taken to supply evidence which is nowadays furnished by the directory and the Clergy list. In every instance, the purpose and circumstances of the document should be carefully considered. Is it, for example, a licence to found a chantry? If the statement is made that the

<sup>1</sup> See, *e.g.*, instances of bequests to the church of Thirsk (*Yorks Archæol. Journal*, XXII, 209).

<sup>2</sup> Lambeth Reg. Stafford, ff. 178d-179d.

chantry is to be founded in a chapel newly constructed or about to be constructed, here is clear architectural evidence.<sup>1</sup> If there is no such statement, architectural evidence is wanting, although, by comparison with the existing fabric, the document may offer strong corroborative testimony. The Crown, in granting the licence, the bishop, in ordaining the chantry, were concerned, the first with the financial aspect of the foundation, the second with the proper regulation of its services. The building, if there was a new building in the case, had nothing to do with them: it was a matter of contract between the founder and a master-mason and any allusion to it in the documents in question, however fortunate it may be for our purpose, is purely incidental. It is much to be regretted that medieval building-contracts, such as those for the churches of Catterick (1410)<sup>2</sup> and Fotheringhay (1434),<sup>3</sup> do not survive in more cases. Those which we have enable us to understand the conditions of medieval church-building and to form certain general conceptions of which, in their absence, the episcopal registers will have nothing to say. To look for architectural information in an episcopal register, however, is a dangerous

<sup>1</sup> See, *e.g.*, the licence to William Nesefeld to endow a chaplain in the chapel of Scotton, near Knaresborough, newly built by him, 29 Jan. 1848-9 (*Cal. Pat.* 1848-50, p. 256).

<sup>2</sup> Printed by Raine, J., 1884, and by McCall, H. B., *Richmondshire Churches*, 1910, pp. 37-40. The contract (1409-10) for the south aisle of Hornby church, in the same neighbourhood, is printed *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Printed, with some errors, in Dugdale, *Monasticon* (ed. Caley, etc.), VI, (8) 1414 sqq.



task,<sup>1</sup> and the mistakes which have been founded with the best intentions upon misinterpretations of episcopal documents are exceedingly numerous.

There is an elementary point which it is useful to remember in connexion with church fabrics. No question is asked more frequently than, "Who built them?" The meaning is vague, but presumably it implies, more often than not, "Who caused them to be built?" The indifferent use of *fecit* and *fecit fieri*, familiar in medieval chronicles, is as common in our own day. The answer is generally even more vague, but the charge of building is frequently laid, with or without reason, upon the monks of some neighbouring abbey; and this seems more specious when it is actually a matter of fact that the monastery held the advowson and appropriated the rectory. The splendour of the row of great parish churches in South Lincolnshire between Long Sutton and Spalding seems to give colour to the theory, sanctioned by many guide-books, that they were the result of pious emulation between the monasteries, Croyland, Castleacre and Spalding, which profited by the acquisition of their rectorial tithes. The probability does not seem to be greatly weakened by the fact that the writer who was the first to formulate this theory in print, about eighty years ago, brought forward no documentary evidence

<sup>1</sup> Thus an award made in 1394 as to the allotment of liability for contributions to the repair of the tower of Stottesdon church, Salop (*Hereford Reg. Trefnant* [Cant. and York Soc.], pp. 19, 20), does not necessarily, though it may possibly, refer to actual work proceeding at the time or lately completed.

and confounded the priory of "Acre" with the abbey of St. Mary at York, which thus obtained a gratuitous share in the competition.<sup>1</sup> It is also equally tempting to believe that the beautiful church of Heckington, near Sleaford, was the result of the appropriation of the rectory to Bardney abbey in 1845 and that the chancel was built at the costs of a vicar whom they appointed at that date.

Historical fact, however, is against these plausible fancies. In the first place, the responsibility for the building of churches was very definitely divided between the rector and the parishioners. The rector owned the chancel and was bound to keep it in repair. A pious friend might relieve him of his duties: thus in the fourteenth century a wealthy king's clerk, Thomas Sibthorpe, took on himself the expense of rebuilding the chancel of the parish church of his native village of Sibthorpe, Notts,<sup>2</sup> doubtless to the great satisfaction of the rector. The nave of the church, the *ecclesia* proper, on the other hand, was under the control of the parishioners. Henry Bray, to whom we have already referred, tells us that the chancel of Harleston church was rebuilt by the rector, while he himself and another local gentleman took charge of the fabric of the nave. When, late in the fifteenth century, the tower of Silkstone church, near Barnsley, at the crossing of the church was taken down and a new tower built at the west end, the relative responsibilities of the parishioners

<sup>1</sup> *Churches of Lincolnshire*, 1841.

<sup>2</sup> York Reg. Zouche, fo. 99.

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and the rectors, the prior and convent of Pontefract, for repairing the portion of the church on the site of the old tower, now partially included in the chancel, had to be determined by a commission.<sup>1</sup> It is thus clear that a monastery which possessed the rectory of a church was liable only for the chancel. Further, the appropriation of a rectory was a source of income to a monastery: indiscriminate appropriation, after the statute of mortmain (1279), was no longer permitted. In the past, it had led to neglect of churches and their services, apart from the damage which it caused to the rights of the Crown and the diocesan. If a monastery wished to appropriate a church, it had to plead the excuse of poverty or depreciation of income; and this, which would certainly be no inducement to expensive building, was usually set forth at some length in petitions for appropriation.<sup>2</sup> If we apply this to the case of Heckington, the rebuilding of the church by Bardney abbey at once becomes unlikely. Moreover, the date 1345 is suspiciously late for most of the existing fabric, which, upon its architectural evidence, was completed rather than begun about that time. And, when the facts about the so-called vicar, whose tomb remains

<sup>1</sup> York Reg. Laur. Bothe, fo. 312.

<sup>2</sup> The petition, *e.g.*, for the appropriation of Geddington church, Northants, to Pipewell abbey, 1857-8, pleads the poverty of the monastery owing to the barrenness of its land, the scarcity of labourers, the mortality among its tenants and consequent decline of rents. Fire and flood and the neighbourhood of the house to the forest of Rockingham and its beasts of game had also contributed to the general depression (Lincoln Reg. IX, fo. 171d).

in the chancel, are examined, it is found that he was really the last rector of the church, presented by the Crown in 1309, thirty-six years before the appropriation, and that he was a well-to-do clerk in the king's service, who would be far better able to meet the costs of a magnificent and spacious chancel than a vicar whose only obvious source of revenue was the scanty endowment assigned to him from the fruits of the appropriated church.<sup>1</sup> The parishioners now step into their rightful place as the builders of the nave. Less evidence is available for the other churches which have been mentioned; but here again general custom asserts that, in default of positive evidence to the contrary, the parishioners met the expense of the nave in each case, while the monastic rectors paid for the chancels. In practice it will be found, not unnaturally, that monasteries were unready to fulfil their obligations too quickly and generously. Monks were neither architects nor architectural missionaries, although there were many, especially in the earlier period of English and Anglo-Norman monasticism, who had an enthusiasm for art and some knowledge of its practice.<sup>2</sup> To credit them with lavishing sums of money upon churches whose revenues were actually assigned to the relief of their own needs would be to assume an impossibility. The chancels of appropriated churches

<sup>1</sup> See *Assoc. Archit. Soc. Reports*, XXXII, 65-6.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the interest taken in architecture by the Lombards, William of Volpiano and Lanfranc of Pavia, has been made the basis of a structure of architectural inferences for which documents afford no real evidence.

often tell their own tale of long-delayed repairs and consequent patchwork, or, at best, of a rebuilding incommensurate in grandeur of scale and beauty with the rest of the building. Of the noble fourteenth-century chancels which are common in England, especially in the Midlands, very few are to be found in churches appropriated to monasteries, and these few belong to the period before the appropriation was effected, as at Heckington or at Carcolston, Notts.<sup>1</sup> No visitor to the churches of Melton Mowbray and St. Mary's, Nottingham, can fail to be struck by the comparative insignificance of the chancel as compared with the nave and transepts of either church. The discrepancy is explained when it is remembered that the rectors were monastic corporations, in the first instance the prior and convent of Lewes, in the second the prior and convent of Lenton.

This point has been dwelt upon at some length because the fabric of the parish church makes a special appeal to the local historian. Its claim upon his imagination is not improbably the origin of his interest in parochial history. It is in itself a record which must be read with care and patience and the methods which he must bring to its study are those which he is bound to apply to written records, the resolution to extract from it all that it has to tell him and the caution which it is necessary to employ against mere surmise. Local legends have doubtless become connected with

<sup>1</sup> For these and kindred chancels, see *Memorials of Old Nottinghamshire*, 1912, pp. 41-5.

it, as with much else in the parish; and these deserve attention and careful sifting for the element of truth which they may contain. To treat them unsympathetically, to "strip fair Truth of every little shadowy vestment in which time and teeming fancies love to array her," is to court the reputation of a mere iconoclast: on the other hand, to pursue the methods of that amiable antiquarian, the bachelor in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is to smother truth altogether. The popular mind, ever since *The Castle of Otranto* and its successors taught it to regard the middle ages as an epoch of mystery and impossible marvels remote from the claims of common sense, has readily accepted the theories that a cross-legged effigy denotes a Crusader, that "low-side windows" were a philanthropic invention for the use of pious lepers, that churches, abbeys and castles were connected by a system of underground passages to the use of which the absence of ventilation made no difference, and that monks, friars and parish priests were convertible terms or mere synonyms for the persons who availed themselves of these subterranean communications.<sup>1</sup> Absurd as such

<sup>1</sup> The popular notion that parish priests were frequently monks rests entirely upon the failure to distinguish between the regular and secular clergy. Monks, in the later middle ages, were allowed now and then to serve parochial cures by special dispensations. Canons regular, especially Premonstratensians, had some licence in this respect; but bishops were unwilling to allow innovations on their part, and it was not until after the pestilence of 1349, which caused great mortality among the clergy, that Austin canons were allowed with any frequency to take charge of churches which hitherto had been served by secular priests.

traditions are, they have acquired a remarkable prevalence. The task of demolishing them, however amusing it may be, is too often lost labour; and the better course is to present the ascertainable facts in the history of a church or parish in such a way that the intelligent reader may learn for himself the principles upon which the distinction between truth and legend is founded. Success necessarily depends upon the writer's power of imagination, his ability to picture to himself the scenes which his documents unfold and to transmit the living interest which they arouse in his own mind. The use of imagination is a very different thing from a surrender to dreams and visions and, with humour and common sense to aid it, is a powerful antidote to the allurements of fancy.

Parochial history, in short, is founded upon the faithful and discriminating use of existing documents. Enough has been said to show that the essential point for the record-searcher to grasp is the true scope and purpose of his document, the circumstances, that is, of its compilation and the intention of its compilers. To attempt to obtain from it more than it offers is to waste time and run the risk of writing false history. Of this modern scholars constantly remind us: Dr. Horace Round, for instance, trenchantly exposes the errors of those who look upon Domesday book and the records of twelfth-century scutages as dealing with the same class of subject.<sup>1</sup> Further, original documents cannot be read altogether by the light of nature. A competent knowledge of Latin,

<sup>1</sup> *Feudal England*, pp. 229-81

